

First Step: Getting In

Nancy Del Grande

A pink outhouse in the middle of the desert meant only one thing . . . the first woman physicist had arrived at the Nevada Test Site.

as the first woman physicist to design, field, and test a major x-ray diagnostic experiment on a nuclear device at the Nevada Test Site in the early 1960s, I had a problem. The test was conducted in a tunnel. I was told that because I was a woman, I couldn't enter the tunnel lest the miners would strike.

Some three centuries earlier, Welsh miners thought women in tunnels would bring them bad luck. This was the United States during the early sixties. I knew the miners would not strike. My father, a professor of geology from Columbia University, had taken his female associates and graduate students in tunnels without causing a strike.

But without access to the tunnel, I knew I could not guarantee successful results for my experiment. To gain access to the tunnel, another fundamental issue had to be addressed. Bill Wakeman, the lead engineer, would have to enter 30 minutes before me to make sure the red warning light was lit so the miners would know not to relieve themselves in the tunnel while I was there.

When I arrived, there were no toilet facilities for women within miles of the tunnel. Finally, the Laboratory purchased an outhouse at a small cost. Someone painted the outhouse pink and hung a sign inside saying "Smile, Nancy. You're on Candid Camera."

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The Fruit of Their Efforts

Vince Tobia

Tobia knew big projects would come and go, but what the gardeners planted would remain for years to come.

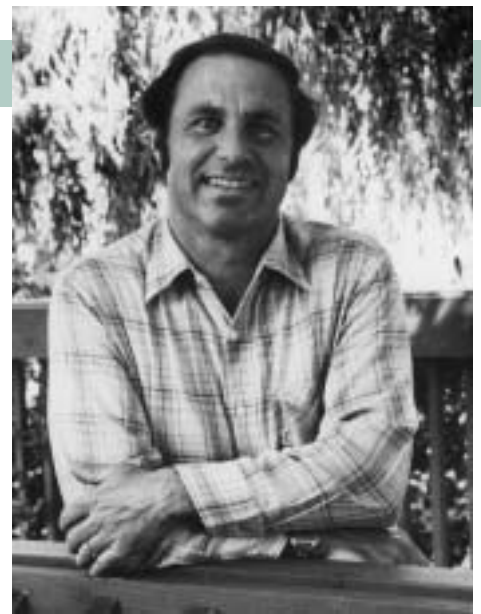
When I was hired into the Garden Shop in 1960, I was the young guy on the block. I didn't know about gardening in the area, but I had a lot of agricultural schooling, so they hired me.

Most of the early gardeners were of Filipino and Mexican descent. They started out as custodians, but the Lab needed gardeners, so they moved over to gardening. Many of the Filipino and Mexicans had experience with the Jackson-Perkins rose farms in the area, and boy, did they know about gardening. Supposedly I was the learned one, yet they taught me a lot of things. I was quite impressed with them. They really took it to heart, and they worked very hard to make the early changes from the old naval airbase grounds to a beautiful Laboratory campus. We had a mission, and our group worked that way for the 21 years I worked there. It continues to this day.

The garden shop had these "mules," which were vehicles with big heavy lead

fenders that were formerly used to haul airplanes around. The trades would get them first, and then we would end up getting them. We would go out onto the fields with these things. The old airfields were fine, but the minute you would get off the asphalt, you would sink like a stone. It was comic: you'd be going along, doing your work, then just hit a soft spot and all 4 wheels would instantly go down to the axles or more. Then we would have to get out, go wading in the mud to call the operating engineers with tractors, and say, "Hey, I'm stuck out in the north 40."

But we worked really hard, learned our jobs, and became more adept. I went to school, became a pest control person, and passed that on. We did a lot to better our position here. Hazards Control worked with us in training and safety, and by the time we were finished, we knew how to operate 60-foot aerial trucks, tractors, pest control equipment, and related maintenance equipment. We ended up with 30 to 35 well trained people. Lawn cutters ended up as plant tenders and pest control people. I developed the Indoor Plants Department, and as I learned, I passed it on. By the time I



Vince Tobia.

left, there were over a thousand plants to maintain.

As we grew, the job became less of a stigma. People looked at it as a skilled job, and it paid more. So I grew up along with the Lab. It was wonderful to see it evolve into a more professional job with good results. I saw a lot of projects that were high profile and high priority for 2 years or 5 years, and then they'd be gone. But we planted plants, and knew that they'd still be here in 50 years. And I always tried to pass that along to the crew. To this day, they have that pride.

Incognito

Paula Naillon

Naillon, the only woman engineer at Livermore for 17 years, got the job done even when it meant having to work disguised as a man.

I started out working in the Patent Office because it was the only opening where they would consider hiring a woman with an engineering degree. They were concerned that the men talked too rough and that they didn't have any rest rooms for girls.

After a year, I snuck over to the Device Division (now Nuclear Explosives Division), which was where I wanted to work and where I knew they were hiring. They thought that maybe I should be a librarian; I insisted that I wanted to be on a team. They finally said they would give me a try, and for the next 17 years, I was the only woman engineer at the Lab.

I was told that women couldn't go on business to Rocky Flats, a former nuclear weapons facility in Colorado, because you had to walk through the men's shower area to get to the assembly area. I waited until my managers were gone, because I knew they wouldn't approve of my going, and asked my department head to authorize the trip. When the showers were being used at Rocky Flats, engineers simply picked me up and passed me through the tool crib window into the assembly area.

I knew all of the stories about a woman in a tunnel bringing bad luck. I decided to not ask for permission and try something else. The day that I went down into the tunnel, I wore sunglasses, had my hair tied up under a hard hat, and wore a big heavy coat. I simply went down, did my job, and came back up.